



Closed Churchyards

Cornwall

Cormac Solutions Ltd for Cornwall Council

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Biodiversity Legacy Award*

Project overview

Using principles of the 'Living Churchyard' initiative, churches are being helped to manage their churchyards in a wildlife friendly way. Starting in 2020 as a single site pilot at Ludgvan Churchyard, the management scheme has been extended to include 15 closed churchyards across Cornwall.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The churchyards were predominantly grassed areas that were heavily mowed with little focus on supporting wildlife.

Post-implementation of new site management, the abundance of wildflowers at Ludgvan and St Uny that have become established are testament to the co-operation and methods of work adopted by Cormac and the volunteer group.

“Without Cormac's help earlier in the year, the churchyard as with many others in Cornwall would turn into rank grass. Our thanks also go to Cormac staff for their work cutting and clearing the vegetation at the appropriate time of year” – John Hawkey, volunteer ecologist



St Uny in May covered in Rosy Garlic, photo by Kate



Star of Bethlehem discovered in St Uny Church in 2021 with Yellow Rattle, photo by David Brown)



What were the reasons behind this project ?

Changes to local government funding several years ago meant Cornwall Council had to review maintenance standards across all public areas including the frequency of grass cutting in closed churchyards. Churchyard stakeholders felt the new maintenance prescriptions were unsatisfactory, so they started to supplement the Council's programme of work through making their own local arrangements. In the ensuing period, and following several complaints, contact was made with Cormac's Environment team to ask if there was any flexibility in Cormac's works programme to enable closer working together for the good of the Churchyard.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

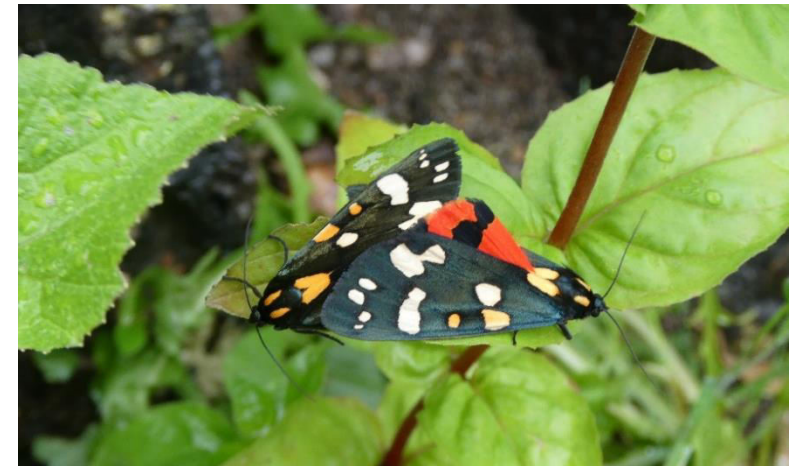
The local community has been the driving factor to changing the maintenance regimes with the Vicar of Ludgvan Churchyard making the initial contact with Cormac's Environment team. Cormac has taken on a stewardship role, engaging and consulting with community interest groups, volunteers and Parochial Church Council members.

Individual management plans were produced for each churchyard due to different infrastructure and layout however there is attention to detail which guides operatives in their work when on site, a degree of flexibility is afforded depending on local views, the levels of growth and the presence of wildflowers in the various areas. Examples of activity include:

- Wildlife areas in older sections. Cut and collected twice a year
- Grassed pathways into wildlife areas, neat and well maintained for access
- Living Churchyard areas, cut and collect up to twice a year. Invasive plants removed or controlled with programme of approved treatment using integrated weed management protocols.



Grassed pathways into wildlife areas and Living Churchyard areas



Mating pair of Scarlet Tiger Moths. Photo by Kate Kalziel



A 'total site maintenance' approach is adopted so that a variety of activities can be undertaken on site to ensure the right tools are in place to minimise travel and repeat visits reducing carbon emissions and providing efficiencies.

Grillo 'cut and collect' machines are utilised where space and access allows to ensure grass is removed during cutting of areas where wildflowers and grasses are establishing. This helps in removing nutrients from the soil and enables wildflowers to flourish. Hand raking to remove arisings and use of compost is undertaken to help the process. In addition, other items of equipment enable hedges to be trimmed, weeds removed from walkways (thermal lance), overhanging trees to be trimmed and a variety of hand-held tools such as shovels and brooms are available.

Grass cuttings and green waste have been recycled on site via composting into a mulch soil improver.

Further information

Benefits of close working with the community were seen early on. At St Uny a passionate local ecologist took a deep interest and provided regular feedback to Cormac and the Council. He created a diary from February 2021 to August 2021 of the abundant wildflowers, documenting the species and providing photographs. This included rare orchids and the delicate Star of Bethlehem spotted for the very first time in this churchyard. The field scabious also attracted the rare mining bee.

“Over the years, I have been one of a small, but very dedicated band of volunteers, in pursuit of the Diocese of Truro ‘Living Churchyard’ project, raking and clearing the vegetation after Cormac’s annual cut. What a blessing when Cormac in October 2020 undertook to carry out this work, not only to cut but remove all the cuttings as well!! Your staff’s efforts last autumn has already started to bear fruit. 1,000’s of Snowdrops and hundreds of purple & yellow crocuses now in flower.”



*St Uny Churchyard Outputs 2021
Photos by David Brown*



Extensive area of Large Scabious flowers in June 2022 attracting the very rare Lar Scabious Mining bee (Andrena hattorfiana).

Photos by David Brown



The legacy has been that the gains made during the Ludgvan Churchyard trial have provided the building blocks to roll out the management plan approach to 15 closed churchyards across the County. The focus has been to take advantage of these churchyards that already have multiple group involvement, with varying aspirations and objectives. The management plan clearly sets out and maps areas of responsibility in a holistic approach, albeit delivered with a combination of volunteers, public interest groups and Cormac's own operational teams.

Project Team

- Client: Cornwall Council
- Delivery: Cormac Solutions Ltd – Environment Team
- Stakeholders: Local church wardens, friend's groups, individual volunteers

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

To help churches to promote biodiversity, support wildlife habitat and develop maintenance regimes that preserve native species, while being sensitive to the needs of all users paying particular heed to the primary function as a resting place for the dead and a contemplative place for friends and relatives of those buried there.

Furthermore, to work with local church wardens, friend's groups and volunteers to ensure that their churchyards are maintained to meet local aspirations and Cornwall Council service requirements. Working with local people to make space for nature, creating havens for wildlife that bring joy to visitors and our community.